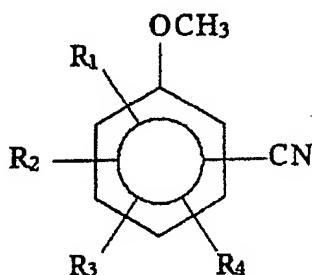


IN THE CLAIMS:

1-9 (canceled)

10. (currently amended) A process for the catalyst-free preparation of cyanophenols from methoxybenzonitriles, comprising reacting a substituted methoxybenzonitrile of the general formula (I)



wherein

R₁, R₂, R₃ and R₄ are each independently hydrogen, a C₁₋₁₀-alkyl, C₂₋₈-alkoxy, aryl, a phenoxy or a further nitrile group with an alkali metal alkoxide at a temperature between 80 and 230°C.

11. (new) The process as claimed in claim 10, wherein the methoxybenzonitrile component used comprises di-, tri- tetra- or pentamethoxybenzonitriles.

12. (new) The process as claimed in claim 10, wherein the alkali metal alkoxide used is a methoxide, more preferably sodium methoxide.

13. (new) The process as claimed in claim 10, wherein the process is carried out at temperatures between 120 and 200°C.

14. (new) The process as claimed in claim 10, wherein the molar ratio of the methoxybenzonitrile component to the alkali metal alkoxide component is 1:0.5 to 1.5.

15. (new) The process as claimed in claim 10, wherein it is carried out in the presence of a polar solvent, a nonpolar solvent, a C₁₋₆-alcohol, tetrahydrofuran, methanol benzene, toluene, xylene or methyl tert-butyl ether.

16. (new) The process as claimed in claim 10, wherein the alkoxide component is initially charged in an alcohol, then the methoxybenzonitrile component is added and preferably heated with stirring.

17. (new) The process as claimed in claim 10, wherein the methoxybenzonitrile component was prepared by ammoxidizing a methoxytoluene and in the presence of ammonia and oxygen.

18. (new) The process as claimed in claim 17, wherein the methoxybenzonitrile component is further reacted after the ammoxidation directly without isolation.

19. (new) The process as claim in claim 12, wherein said methoxide is sodium methoxide.

20. (new) The process as claimed in claim 13, wherein said temperature is between 140 and 180°C.

21. (new) The process as claimed in claim 14, wherein said molar ratio is 1:1.0 to 1.1.

22. (new) The claim as claimed in claim 16, wherein the heating is conducted in an autoclave.

23. (new) The process as claimed in claim 17, wherein the oxygen is atmospheric.